



**NJPSA Testimony on Student Assessment in NJ
Before the Joint Committee on the Public Schools
Arlene Rogo, Principal of Neptune High School
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Good afternoon Chairwoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. I am Arlene Rogo, the Principal of Neptune High School and the current President of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association. I am a career educator, serving my 41st year in public education. I have served as a teacher, supervisor, assistant principal and principal and have leadership experience in schools at all grade levels from elementary to middle and high school. It is this experience, and the perspective of NJPSA members across the state that I bring to this discussion today on the subject of student assessment in education.

As an instructional leader at the school building level, I see first-hand, the importance of student assessment as an integral part of the instructional process. To be an effective tool, our assessments must be linked to New Jersey's Learning Standards, our local curriculum and strong instructional practice in the classroom. Just as a doctor relies upon blood tests, MRIs and other pieces of functional data to diagnose a patient, educators rely on multiple data points, including assessment results, multiple teacher observations and more to identify learning issues and respond appropriately. Teacher engagement and first-hand observation of students within the instructional context, provides critical information to the student learning process. These factors, assessment data, a strong curriculum, and strong instructional practices, provide the key ingredients to student learning.

However, the use of assessments must be balanced with other critical factors in the learning process including such basics as the amount of instructional time available during the school day. The amount of instructional time has been significantly threatened by new curriculum mandates and assessment requirements. NJPSA members believe we must be strategic in our use of state assessments, streamlining and targeting student assessment to appropriate times within the school calendar and avoiding duplication and over testing.

This fall for example, the NJDOE suddenly required all public-school districts to administer Start Strong Assessments across grade levels and subject areas. This surprise requirement provided little "added value" in information to school districts since all districts had just administered more comprehensive state assessments to students a few months earlier, even though we had not received the test results! It also interfered with every educator's goal of welcoming back our students and setting a positive

learning climate for students who have experienced too much upheaval, trauma and interruptions in their instructional time.

So, despite these challenges, why is assessment so important? The benefits depend upon the type of assessment and its purpose. Let me share a building leader's perspective.

Teachers utilize assessments regularly within their classrooms to understand the level of student understanding of learning content and their students' ability to apply subject matter content in a problem – solving context. This information assists the teacher in refining his/her instructional approach, modifying curricula if needed, setting the pace of instruction, and providing instructional assistance and interventions to individual students as needed. Learning challenges can be shared with parents who can work in partnership with the teacher to assist the student. **These teacher-developed diagnostic assessments are among the most important and effective tools we use to assist students in their learning throughout the school year.**

School districts also utilize a broader system of benchmark assessments to review the progress in student learning as the year progresses. Again, these assessments provide important information to educators, students, and parents on the learning levels of individual students, but benchmark assessments provide important data on instruction across classrooms and grade levels. This information is analyzed locally by teachers and instructional leaders during the school year to fine-tune instructional practices, pacing, curriculum, and school-based interventions.

State level, standardized assessments are another component of our assessment system that seek to measure not only student learning growth, **but also school system accountability under federal legal requirements.** Our NJSLA (NJ Student Learning Assessment) tests are administered annually to all public schools within the state in grades 3 through 8, and once in high school in language arts, math, and science. These assessments provide comparative information of student performance across subgroups of students within and across school districts, identify achievement gaps, and “red flag” the need to effectively respond to such gaps. These test results are also utilized to identify districts “in need of improvement” where there is a real need for systemic support and assistance to address comprehensive learning gaps within the district. These are important functions of system accountability, but the results have no “high stakes” outcome for an individual student who scores below expectations.

Further, New Jersey utilizes these test results and other student performance measures in the evaluation of individual teachers and principals under our educator evaluation law, TEACH NJ (2012). Since the pandemic put a temporary hold on state testing requirements in 2020 and 2021, the use of outdated standardized test score data to evaluate current educator performance is questionable as a fair measure of an educator's performance. This is an issue that requires further consideration.

One final component of New Jersey's formal assessment landscape is the statutory requirement that high school students pass the NJGPA, our legislatively mandated "do or die" graduation exit examination. By law and practice, students who do not pass the NJGPA assessment cannot receive a high school diploma unless they demonstrate proficiency through an alternative portfolio process that is stressful, labor intensive and time consuming. The stated purpose of the exam is to hold students individually accountable for meeting the learning standards mandated during the high school experience. The test requirement also arguably provides a level of assurance to the public, our business community and policy makers that a high school diploma in our state signifies that a student has in fact met the core proficiency marks in key subject areas to earn a state diploma.

The reality is that current high school seniors have demonstrated proficiency at other points in their high school career. They also have a lot on their plates.

If intending to pursue higher education, they are taking the SAT, ACT (and completing college applications during their senior year), assessments that are more comprehensive and challenging. If moving on to the world of work, they may be taking equally challenging professional licensing exams or beginning their job search. They must meet state graduation standards by passing all required courses, meeting attendance requirements, and meeting any local graduation requirements in place in their school district. They have also been assessed over the course of their educational career in each course and classroom and on all mandated state assessments.

NJPSA, as an association is currently reviewing A-4639 (Caputo, Jasey, McKnight), legislation that would eliminate the high school graduation assessment requirement in the context of today's learning environment in New Jersey. As we seek broad input from our members and review the educational research, we will share our recommendations as the legislation moves forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to address how student assessment is used in New Jersey schools. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.